

The Builder.

No. CXLII.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1845.



ANY bad measures are carried, and good measures kept back, by the mere spirit of party. Men are often led by *esprit de corps* to vote with reference only to the triumph of the section with whom they act, and not to the merits of the main question at issue. In numerous instances, improvements of the greatest consequence have been rejected simply because they were brought forward by parties opposed to a majority,—unwillingness to add the views of one they disliked, envied, or feared, serving to close their eyes to the merits of a proposal, which under other circumstances would have had their earnest support.

It is much to be hoped, that no such feelings will be allowed to operate in the Westminster Court of Sewers at the present moment: still we have fears on the subject, as is evident from the expression of the hope. That the sewers within its jurisdiction are sadly inefficient, has already been made manifest in our pages. They are little better than one huge cesspool, filled with decomposing matter (tending materially to injure public health), and many of them, moreover, are in a state of great dilapidation, in consequence of the badness of the form employed, and other circumstances. Some of them are so choked up with solid matter as to be almost impassable; and we have heard of an instance (but can hardly believe it), where a new sewer, built to accord with what was considered the level of the sewer into which it was to discharge itself, was of necessity taken down and reconstructed, on discovering that what had been supposed the proper bottom of the old sewer was simply the surface of the accumulated soil, and was more than a foot above the right level.

A writer who addressed us last week, with a desire to say the Westminster Sewers were not in the deplorable state set forth in our pages, and in the commissioners' own "Book of Informations,"—but who evidently knows that they are,—remarks:—

"One of the greatest evils now existing, and which is continually the cause of almost innumerable cesspools, is the large, old-fashioned grates over the gully-holes in the public streets. The large divisions between the bars of these grates are continually admitting into the sewers great quantities of stones and rubbish, which immediately fall into the sewers, and form dams or obstructions to the passage of all the light soil, in some instances to the depth of two feet; this defect might be (and I hope will be) soon remedied by substituting new grates of smaller divisions, which would almost entirely prevent a recurrence of this intolerable nuisance, and ultimately would be a saving of very great expense, as all these obstructions are obliged to be removed by opening the sewers, and bringing up the stuff into the streets to be carted away: an annoyance most desirable to be practised as seldom as possible."

Now, we can mention another cause of obstruction and consequent deposition, and that is, the heap of gravel and rubbish, too often

left on the bottom of the sewer by the workmen when patting in the connecting drains from houses. In one long sewer an eminent builder informs us, the houses in the street above, may be counted by these little hillocks, which dam back the water, and necessarily induce deposition.

These, however, are but local causes, and if prevented, which most certainly they should be, would not remove the whole difficulty. The general cause is the shape and level of the sewers. A form of sewer with upright sides (as had been well imagined), was in use in the Westminster division for many years; it has, however, been recently abandoned, and another substituted for it, yet this new form is but a slight improvement upon that which it superseded. The greater curvature given to the invert certainly somewhat confines the stream to a narrower channel, and so increases its velocity and its cleansing power, but the increased velocity thus gained over that afforded by the old form, under the most favourable circumstances, is so very slight, that it is of little or no avail in preventing deposits and accumulations of matter. The inefficiency of the form is admitted by the commissioners, and proved collaterally by the evidence published with the first Report of the commissioners for inquiring into the state of large towns; and in the report of the proceedings at the last court of sewers, which follows our present article, it will be seen that a day was then set apart to examine various new forms that had been submitted to them, including, after a struggle against it, the form proposed by Mr. Phillips, which we laid before the public last week.

Of the excellence of this latter we have no doubt; and what is of very great importance, its cost is much less than that of the present form; taking for example the No. 2 sewer, the cost as now executed is 17s. and 6d. per foot lineal; whereas the cost in accordance with our engraving is estimated at 11s. and 6d. per foot.*

The opinion formed of it by practical men is shown by the following document which was read by Mr. Leslie at the court on Friday, in support of a motion to the effect that this form should be adopted:—

London, 16th October, 1845.

DEAR SIR,—At your request, we have examined the annexed lithographed sections of sewers, signed "John Phillips."

We are of opinion that sewers so formed would be most efficient as regards drainage, and durable and economical in their construction.—(Signed)

THOS. CURRIE, JOHN & CHAS. RIGBY,
GRIFFITH & Peto, ELGER & KELK,
WILLIAM HERRERT, RICH BIEBS.

This certificate must enforce the attention of the commissioners; they cannot easily pooh, pooh! any project thus accredited. Un-

* The following table shows what would be the cost, according to the depths, for one foot lineal of three several sizes of egg-shaped sewers proposed by Mr. Phillips. The first size is 3 ft. wide, and 4 ft. 8 in. high inside, and the walls one brick thick; the quantity of reduced brickwork in mortar is 7 ft. 14 in., and in cement 3 ft. 4 in.; one rod together will execute 27 ft. 8 in., run. The second size is 2 ft. 6 in. wide, and 3 ft. 11 in. high inside, the walls one brick thick; the quantity of reduced brickwork in mortar is 6 ft., and in cement 3 ft. 6 in.; one rod will execute 23 ft. 8 in., run. The third size is 2 ft. wide, and 2 ft. 4 in. high inside, and the walls one brick thick; the quantity of reduced brickwork in mortar is 5 ft. 2 in., and in cement 2 ft.; one rod will execute 20 ft., run. The digging, including timber, strutting, &c., is calculated at 1s. 4d. a cubic yard; and the brickwork, in mortar at 11s. 6d. a rod; and in cement at 16s. 8d. a rod.

No. 1 Sewer.

TOTAL COST OF DIGGING AND BRICKWORK.

Depth of digging to bottom of trench:—

18 ft. 6 in.	12s. 6d. per foot.
23 "	16 "

No. 2 Sewer.

10 ft. 6 in.	10s. 3d. per foot.
16 "	12 "

No. 3 Sewer.

7 ft. 6 in.	8s. 4d. "
15 "	10 "

fortunately, however, such a captious spirit prevails at this moment, and so many commissioners have expressed opinions perhaps too hastily taken up, or have acceded to views proposed by others, to which they consider themselves bound, that we can hardly anticipate such an unprejudiced discussion of the question as its importance demands and the metropolis has a right to expect. We seriously urge the commissioners to put aside every other object but that of attaining the best and cheapest form of sewers; and if any, from fresh evidence now before them, are satisfied that the egg-shaped sewer must be better than one with straight sides (and we respectfully submit that this cannot be denied), it is to be hoped they will not fail to act in accordance with that opinion, even though they may have previously expressed themselves differently.

It is not our intention at this moment to comment on the general management of the Westminster Commission, although it is unquestionably open to animadversion. We trust, however, it will not be considered impertinent if we hereafter revert to the subject. With so important a trust, a revenue of from 20,000l. to 30,000l. a year, or more if they please, and great powers, it is of the utmost consequence that the duties of the commission should be efficiently discharged. It is not a party question, not a mere parish question, but one of national importance (as can easily be shown), and if any improvements are necessary, they should forthwith be attended to, or the public will themselves interfere, and see that they are made. The time has gone by for legislating from behind a curtain, unquestioned.

WESTMINSTER COURT OF SEWERS.

On Friday, the 15th instant, a numerous meeting of the court took place, and some very important business was transacted. It being on the business paper to pay Mr. Jay, the contractor, 3,000l. on account, Mr. Leslie objected to it, and called for the report of the committee of accounts on the subject. It appeared that the committee had had a meeting on the 7th instant, and the report stated that "the assistant surveyor, Mr. Doull, having presented the bills of the contractor, Mr. Jay, for the quarter ending Midsummer 1845, with the abstracts complete, resolved that the said bills, amounting to 1,457l. 2s. 9d., be approved and recommended for payment."

Mr. Leslie said Mr. Jay had received 2,500l. which he considered more than paid the whole bill, and stated that the committee of accounts were putting the public accounts of the commission into almost inextricable confusion, for while Mr. Jay had received 2,000l. on account in April, and 1,000l. on account in May, it was not until the 20th of June, he received 270l. 2s. 1d. balance of his bills to Christmas 1844. Mr. Leslie stated that the whole amount of the bills to Christmas 1844, were only 270l. 2s. 1d., and that it was utterly impossible for Mr. Hertlet to keep these accounts while such proceedings were suffered. The chairman and Mr. Hawkes both contradicted Mr. Leslie, urging that the 2,000l. in April, was on account of works generally, and the 1,000l. in May, on account of the restoration of the sewer in the Gloucester-road, Paddington, as were the remaining sums mentioned by Mr. Leslie, in June 1,000l. and August 1,500l. on account of works since Lady-day.

Mr. T. L. Donaldson then moved, and was seconded by Mr. T. W. Marriott, "That 1,000l. be paid to the contractor on account of the works of the eastern division, and 2,000l. on account of the Ranelagh division, and that it be referred to the committee of accounts to direct the clerk to apportion to such districts as they think most proper the sums already advanced." The following thirteen commissioners voting for Mr. Donaldson's motion, viz.:—Messrs. Baylis, Biffin, John Boadie, jun., Clowser,